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UPDATED NOTES ON THE AMTRAK STORAGE FACILITY DISPUTE

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Of course, Union Station is the proper, indeed the only logical point, for the Burlington Amtrak station/platform, but that should not mean the conversion of the waterfront to a railroad yard. This terrible result will happen only if the VTRANS and Vermont Rail System (VRS) proposal to construct a second (passing) track, and passenger train fueling, cleaning and sewage service location at Union Station/Main Street Landing proceeds. This is a multi-million-dollar debacle!

The city (and state) should oppose this terrible plan. A far better option is available at St. Albans.

- *Several specious objections have been raised to oppose the selection/use of any other servicing site.*

These basically boil down to the contention the train will not come to Burlington if it is not serviced at Union Station; that there is no place for the train at the (far better) St. Albans location; that the Amtrak crews can only get their legally required rest if the train terminates at Union Station; that the track on the New England Central RR (NECR) Burlington to Essex Junction branch is unsafe for passenger trains and/or cannot be fixed in a timely fashion; and that in any event the railroad/VTRANS cannot even be advised against this folly--because VRS can supposedly assert "rights of pre-emption" against anything the city (or state) might wish other than compliance with their plans for a new siding/passing track at Union Station.

All these arguments are addressed and refuted below:

- *The Amtrak ETHAN ALLEN train will come to Burlington no matter where the trainset is serviced overnight.*

The ETHAN ALLEN is a "state supported" train. This means Amtrak runs it solely on the request (and in the receipt of the needed operating monetary support) of one or more states. In the case of the ETHAN ALLEN, Vermont and New York are those states. Amtrak would not provide any service over the ETHAN ALLEN route (at least north of Whitehall, New York) were it not for the states' service request/contract and assured financial support. Such trains go to where the sponsor(s) ask for them to go--as long as the operational conditions below are met.

Amtrak needs access to track that is safe for passenger operations; has a station/platform at the terminus to load and unload riders; and, somewhere near the end of the line, provides access to a place to conduct the needed overnight servicing of the train; and that servicing must come with sufficient time-off for its crews to have at least eight hours rest between shifts. There is no requirement that facility it be right at the platform site, indeed around the country Amtrak trains generally go to a near-by yard to be cleaned and serviced after arrival at any given terminal--think the VRS Burlington yards or even better the St. Albans yards of the NECR and/or as soon as possible VIA Rail Canada's facilities in Montreal.

- ***Vermont cannot just withdraw its request to run this train.***

Since 1996 we've taken over \$70,000,000 in Federal grants for improvements to the state-owned VRS' mainline to permit this promised Amtrak route to begin. If we do not implement this passenger service, we will need to repay the Federal government for that support. But nowhere did we promise that Union Station would be the terminal servicing point--only that the train would make a stop at Union Station in Burlington. It can clearly be cleaned and serviced elsewhere.

- ***The argument that there is no room to do this train-servicing work in St. Albans is simply not credible.***

If both Amtrak trains were serviced at the already existing Amtrak St. Albans facility, there would be a need to do the work on one train before the other. Our Amtrak train schedules can be easily set to accommodate this requirement. More than enough track capacity exists either behind the roundhouse and/or in adjacent the Italy Yards, to store an additional 600-foot passenger trainset. The VERMONT is presently the sole occupant overnight of a better than 2000-foot-long track. The combined length of both Amtrak trains will not exceed 1300 feet.

- ***The supposed shortfall in the crews' required rest-time ("hours in service law") argument against going to St. Albans (and as soon as possible to Montreal), is also a red herring.***

Everything depends on what becomes the new schedule of the ETHAN ALLEN.

If the train left New York at 915-945AM it would arrive St. Albans at 600PM. Southbound it could leave 6-8AM. My suggested departure is at 700AM, which allows for a 13-hour interval between arrival one day and departure the next. In all cases the required 8 hours of crew time off would be easily met--indeed the 10 hours needed if the crew was somehow on-duty for 12 consecutive hours, would also be met. The current layover time in St. Albans for the VERMONT is only 12 hours/25 minutes (850PM-915AM), which is shorter than what I propose for the ETHAN ALLEN.

- ***The entire route from New York via Burlington to St. Albans is already cleared for passenger service, except for the 7.9 miles between Burlington and Essex Jct. That connecting branch line requires only modest upgrades to permit either 25 or 40mph passenger operations.***

Indeed, the Amtrak train could proceed as a "dead-head" (empty) movement beyond Burlington, to be serviced in St. Albans, immediately--but running the train empty would squander potential regional/commuter rail ridership. If Vermont adopts the suggested schedule above, the train would depart Burlington northbound daily at 500PM, arriving Essex Jct. at 520PM and St. Albans at 600PM. The next morning southbound the train would leave St. Albans at 700AM, stop at 730AM in Essex Jct. and arrive Burlington at 750AM--thus allowing an 800AM departure for New York. This facilitates a regional passenger rail experiment by allowing day/commuter-trips to/from all stops between St. Albans, Essex Jct. Burlington, Middlebury and Rutland. Trains could also run from Montpelier to Burlington and points south.

At present the Essex Jct. branch line has a Class One track rating--meaning 10mph is the top passenger speed limit. This is clearly not desirable for use by a train with passengers on-board, but it would permit an empty "dead-head" move to the yards in St. Albans. An upgrade to Class Two track, (requiring installing new ties, more rock ballast and some new rail), would permit 25mph passenger speeds. A probable cost for this is in the \$4,000,000 range. An upgrade to the best-case Class Three track standard would call for installing welded rail on the branch, as well as doing the Class Two upgrades. Then the

cost is probably about \$7,000,000. In theory 59mph speeds would be permitted with Class Three track, but with the many bridges, grade crossings and the narrow Winooski River Canyon along the branch, 40mph is the top likely speed. At current Class One conditions, the running time Burlington to Essex Jct. would be a noncompetitive 55 minutes (unless the train moved empty). But at Class Two this drops to about 18-20 minutes and at Class Three to about 15 minutes. There is no need to rebuild the north end tunnel or the bridges to allow a passenger run.

The upgrade of the Essex Jct. branch is a priority in the Five-Year State Rail Plan, but VTRANS has not requested the funds to do the work.

- ***The result of not fixing this short stretch of railroad, when the ETHAN ALLEN finally reaches northern Vermont, will be two disconnected passenger routes, separated by only 7.9 miles of slow track.***

Unless the repairs/upgrades to the Essex Jct. branch are prioritized by VTRANS, the ETHAN ALLEN and VERMONT routes will remain unable to cross-support each other. Not to do this work is a travesty and the need for a good place to service the ETHAN ALLEN is the obvious reason to proceed now. When completed, riders could go not only to/from St. Albans, but also to/from Montreal from either Vermont Amtrak route. Daytrips for Canadians would be possible to Burlington, Vergennes, Middlebury and even Rutland. It is hard to over-estimate the tourist value of this to Vermont.

- ***The ETHAN ALLEN cannot reach Burlington before late summer/early autumn of 2021 at the earliest and the spring of 2022 is most likely.***

This is due to the time needed to complete the complex new tunnel project in Middlebury and to construct a station there. We have the time to fund and accomplish this work before then, if requested and approved this year.

- ***The real cost of the Union Station project will approach, if not exceed, \$2,000,000.***

It requires two new switches, an 800 foot + new passing track, two sets of new four quadrant gates, the new platform, a "Hot Start" electrical hookup, a rebuilt access route to the new platform and ultimately bike-path reconstruction. If the new track/service center is not constructed at Union Station, only raising the platform to 8 inches above the railhead is required for the ETHAN ALLEN to stop at Burlington. VTRANS study figure of \$300,000 +/- is for raising the platform and electrical connections only. They conceal the rest, by claiming the second track will be built no matter what happens with Amtrak.

- ***If the state will not prioritize immediately the upgrade of the track from Burlington to Essex Jct., then in the short-term the Burlington yards remain the best place to service Amtrak (even if VRS must clear one track in the yards of 10-15 stored tank cars!).***

VRS has kept its Dinner Train (which is even longer than the ETHAN ALLEN trainset) in the Burlington yards from May through October for the past two years. It also stored the even longer 2017 AAPRCO passenger train for several days. But if we take Amtrak to St. Albans VRS has no such problem!

- ***Neither Union Station, nor the land in the lakefront park corridor (Urban Reserve), should even have been considered. The city must beware of being drawn into the trap of playing one neighborhood against another.***

No location in Burlington other than the short-term use of the VRS Burlington yards is acceptable on the most basic environmental grounds. Servicing a passenger train is a major industrial function.

- ***Adding the passing (second) track at Union Station assures passenger trains will be present between King and College Streets all night/every night, and that freight trains will use it for a large part of the daytime as well.***

VRS will be able to switch and assemble freight trains using the newly added track capacity, and, the platform track will also see the servicing, and loading/unloading of the VRS Dinner Train during many afternoons/evenings as well.

- ***This terribly planned project creates a truly industrial waterfront.***

By day there will be increased noise, diesel fume pollution, street blockages and at least some danger of derailments; as freight trains are parked on the new line, then switched and rearranged. By night the tiny access along the side of the Amtrak platform will see use by trucks pumping sewage; passengers with luggage loading and unloading from the Amtrak train; car cleaners working on the coaches through the night; fuel trucks coming to refuel the engines at both ends of the train (and the possibility of spills); and diesel engines will be idling within 8 feet of peoples' homes. On very cold nights this will happen all-night long. Between freight car switching by day and the passenger train servicing by night, the residences at Union Station will become uninhabitable and impossible to sell. Public buyouts will be required, a further hidden cost.

The waterfront will be rendered from a place of peace and beauty to an active railway yard.

- ***The argument that VRS can do what it wants at Union Station/Main Street Landing--because of its theoretical "right of pre-emption"--is speculative in the Burlington case.***

This presumes VRS would choose (or be allowed) to defy the will of Burlington--if the City Council acts by voting to oppose this plan-- and/or if VTRANS intervened.

- ***Vermont, not VRS, owns the former Rutland RR's original right of way.***

This is leased to VRS. In the case of the Shelbourne railroad land-use controversy, VRS' prevailed in its development dispute with the town because VRS directly owned the land where they wanted to locate their new salt shed. Thus VRS' Federal right to the pre-emption of local wishes was clear. In the Union Station situation there is room for the situation to end in a different way. VRS might win, but its case would at least not be strengthened if both the city and state were opposed. Easement rights at the site were also a part of the redevelopment plan long since completed at Main Street Landing.

- ***If an expensive Amtrak servicing center is built on the Burlington waterfront, we all must understand that the train will go no further—permanently!***

It would be too embarrassing to spend so much money and then abandon the newly built facility. VTRANS Secretary Joe Flynn has noted that they will not support a plan opposed by Burlington. No neighborhood should be degraded to construct an inappropriate extension of the existing Burlington railroad yards three blocks north into the park, boat, ferry and museum space along Lake Champlain.

The City of Burlington should express its opposition to this terrible project!